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THE 1968 SPRING CROP TOMATO SITUATION

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General Situation

At this date, it is obvious that the 1968 spring tomato season is different and more favorable than that in 1967. Plantings in Florida after December 1, except for January, 1968, have been significantly lower than in 1967 and plantings after December 1, 1967 through March, 1968 were substantially lower than for 1965-66 or 1966-67. However, plantings after December 1, are higher for 1967-68 than for any recent year except 1965-66 or 1966-67. As of April 15, there are 2,590 acres more tomatoes yet to begin harvest in 1968 than were available in 1967. Most of the increase in 1968 over 1967 is in the "pre-fruit set" stage and heavily concentrated in the Manatee-Ruskin area.

Tomato shipments to date in 1968 have been generally lower than for 1967, both for Mexican and domestic tomatoes. It would appear that the peak in imports from Mexico has been reached, although the later plantings are reported to be free from the disease and weather damage that hurt yields in some of the earlier 1967/1968 Mexican crop plantings.

Table 1. Comparisons of Acreage of Vine Ripe Tomatoes With Total Tomato Plantings and Plantings After December 1 in Florida, By Seasons, 1959-1960 to 1967-1968.

Seasons	Total Tomato Plantings		Vine Ripe Tomatoes			
	Total Acreage	Acres Planted After Dec. 1	Acres Planted	Percent of Total Crop	Acres Planted After Dec. 1	Percent Planted After Dec. 1
1959-60	38,270	14,000	2,410	6.3	150	6.2
1960-61	40,640	13,470	3,550	8.7	40	1.1
1961-62	41,520	15,130	3,350	8.1	330	9.8
1962-63	44,150	15,430	4,120	9.3	690	16.7
1963-64	43,420	14,800	5,190	12.0	460	8.9
1964-65	50,200	14,250	6,780	13.5	510	7.5
1965-66	51,450	20,610	8,330	16.2	2,370	28.4
1966-67	46,890	18,270	6,580	14.0	1,290	19.6
1967-68	46,880	16,270	5,330	11.3	680	12.8

Source: Florida Crop and Livestock Reporting Service, Orlando, Florida.

CROP BY STATES AND MAJOR PRODUCTION AREAS

Florida

All planting and transplanting of the late winter and spring tomato crop in Florida was completed by March 1, 1968. Acreage for harvest during the entire 1967-68 season is 46,880 acres or 290 acres more than in 1966-67. Acreage planted after December 1 is 2,000 less this year than last(Table 1).

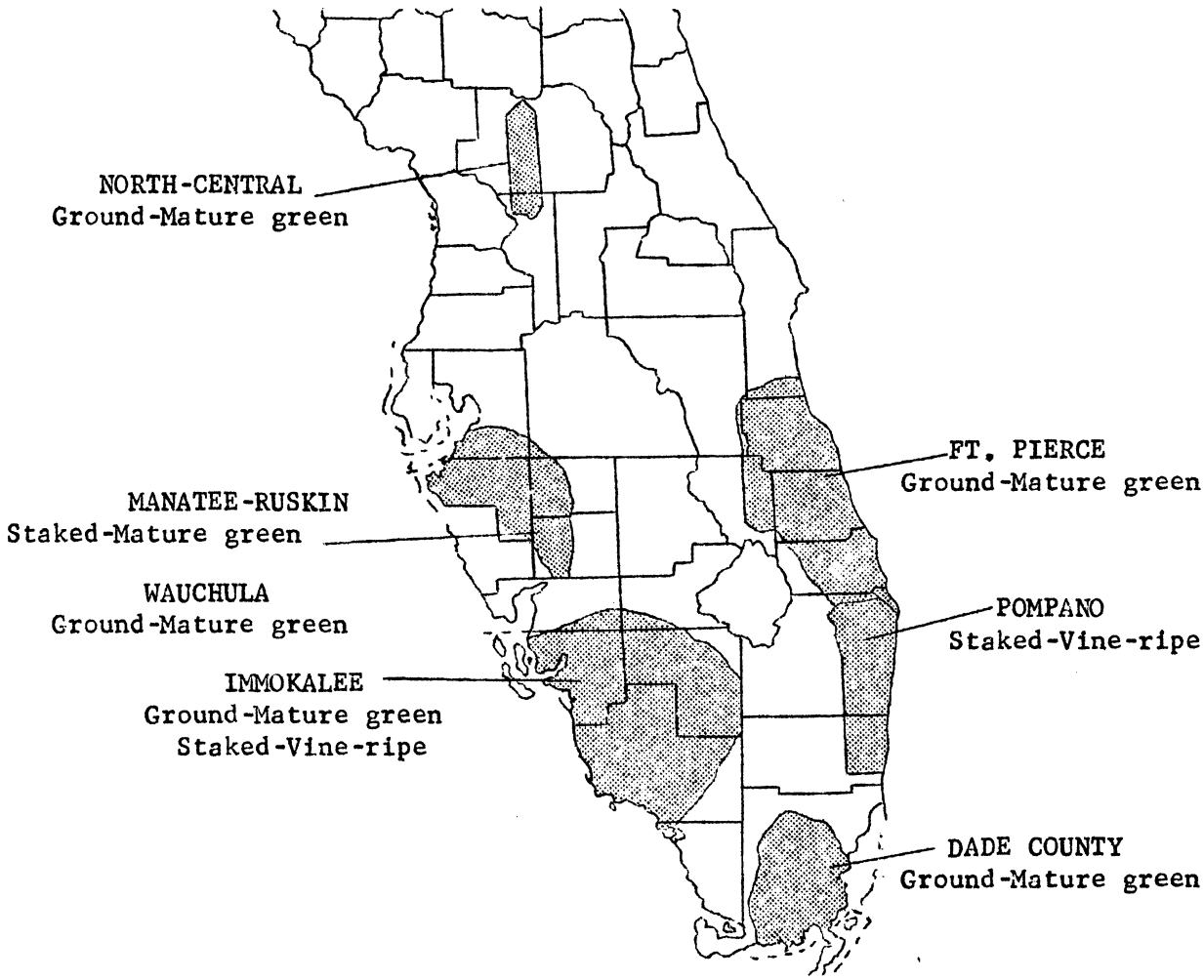
The only major shift in the pattern of plantings and harvest in the various Florida producing areas in 1968 from 1967 has been in the increased and later planting in the Manatee-Ruskin area in 1968 than 1967. As of April 15, 1968, there are 2,590 more acres of tomatoes in Florida in the pre-harvest stage than in 1967. All of this difference is in the "pre-fruit" and "fruit set" stage with 1,230 fewer acres in the "harvest to begin in two weeks" stage. The Manatee-Ruskin area has a total of 2,620 acres more at the "pre-fruit set" stage than at this time in 1967. Normally much of the late Florida acreage is not harvested.

Vine Ripe - 1,250 fewer acres(19 percent) were planted this season than in 1966-67 and a smaller percentage of the vine ripe acreage this season was planted after December 1. This is the third consecutive decline in vine ripe acreage. Harvest of vine ripes has continued longer than usual in old planting because of cool nights.

Texas

Acreage for spring harvest in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas is down about 10 percent from 1967 with 2,000 acres this year compared with a revised acreage of 2,200 last season and a 1962-66 average of 8,380 acres. Growing conditions have slowed maturity and the peak harvest in 1968 will be in June which is several weeks later than usual. No detailed data on planting time are available.

Figure 1. Principal Florida Tomato Producing Areas and Type of Tomatoes Grown



MEXICO

No data on Mexico are available for 1967-68. The Tomato Report by the Florida Crop and Livestock Reporting Service indicated that it would report on Mexico when data were available, but neither this report nor Foreign Agriculture have furnished 1967-68 data.

Table 2. Florida Tomato Acreage Inventory as of April 13, 1968, With Comparisons

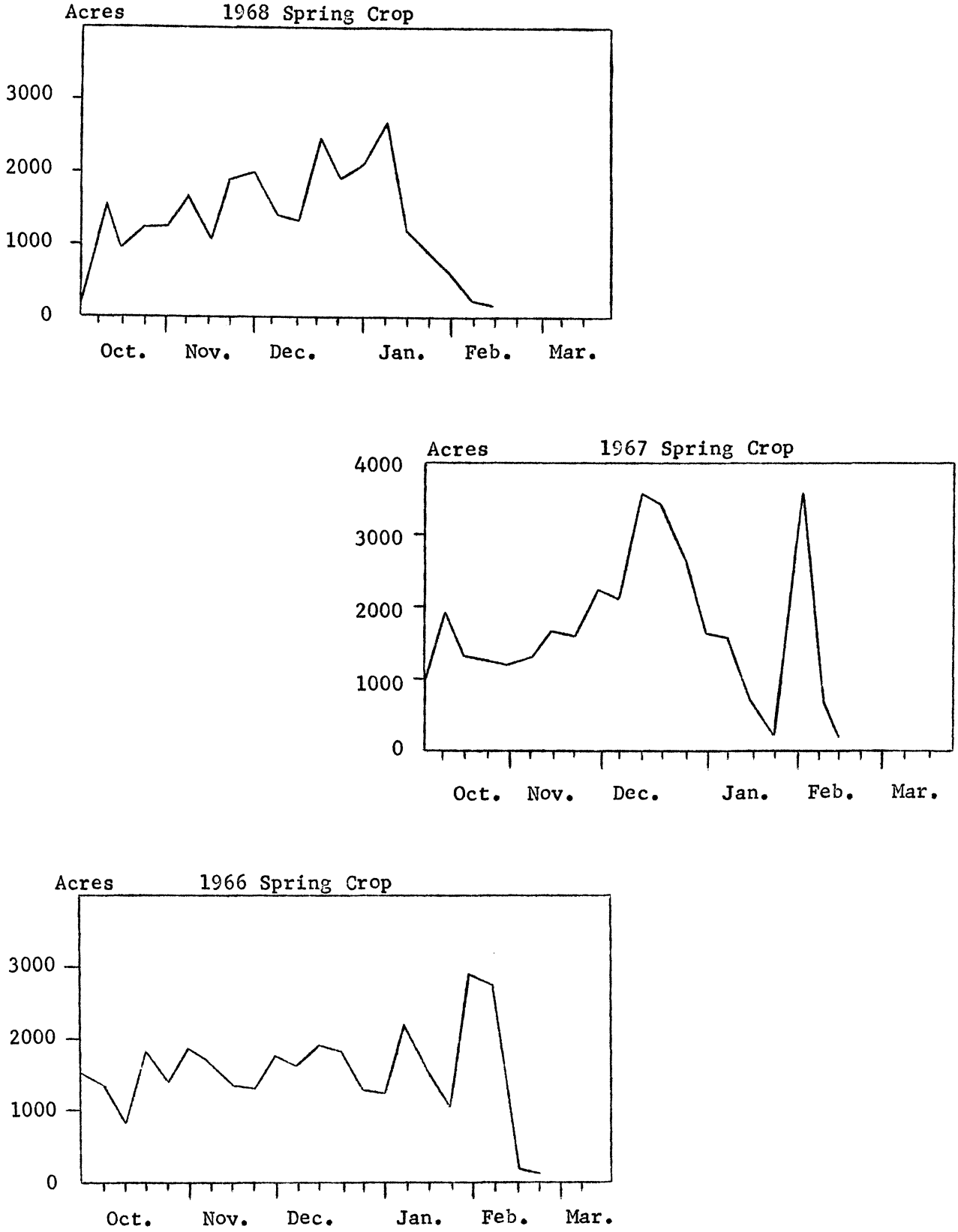
Area	Stage of Development of Acres Growing or in Harvest							Harv'd to Date
	Acres for Harvest	Pre-Fruit Set	Fruit Set	Harvest Begin 2 Weeks	Harvesting Number Times Picked One	Two	3 or More	
Vine-Ripe	5330	---	60	40	---	80	2640	2510
Dade	17710	470	440	700	1300	1780	---	13020
Ft. Pierce	6460	500	2260	80	---	---	---	3620
Immokalee	8270	210	360	1300	1400	340	---	4660
Manatee	8160	3690	2380	---	---	---	---	2090
North Central	950	950	---	---	---	---	---	---
Total Florida								
1967-68	46880	5820	5500	2120	2700	2200	2640	25900
1966-67	46590	2380	5120	3350	3490	2700	2650	26900
1965-66	51610	3030	9660	4070	2460	1170	3860	27360
1964-65	50200	300	2610	2830	2870	2900	3410	35280
1963-64	43380	800	6280	3600	2050	1230	3330	24390
1962-63	44280	1040	3160	6570	3060	2530	3160	23400

Source: Florida Crop and Livestock Reporting Service, Orlando, Florida

Plantings

Total tomato plantings in Florida after January 1, 1968 were 8,140 acres compared with 9,400 acres in 1967. Plantings after February 1 were 1,140 acres in 1968 and 5,200 in 1967. Late plantings were much higher in both 1966 and 1967 than normal. Fruit set and development, however, are later in 1968 than in 1967.

Figure 2. Acreage of Tomatoes Planted Weekly in Florida 1965-66, 1966-67, and 1967-68 Seasons



Source: Florida Crop and Livestock Reporting Service, Orlando, Florida.

Tomato Shipment

Total tomato shipments during March, 1968 were about 800 carloads less than in 1967 while in the first two weeks in April shipments in 1968 were below those in 1967 by more than 500 cars. On the basis of date of planting, the 1968 trend and level of shipments should be somewhat similar to that in 1964. However, the fruit set has been delayed somewhat and the acres yet to start harvest are more similar to that in 1966 than any recent year. The key will be the weather in the Manatee-Ruskin area.

Table 3. Weekly Tomato Shipments From April 16-July 2 Florida, Texas and California 1964-1968

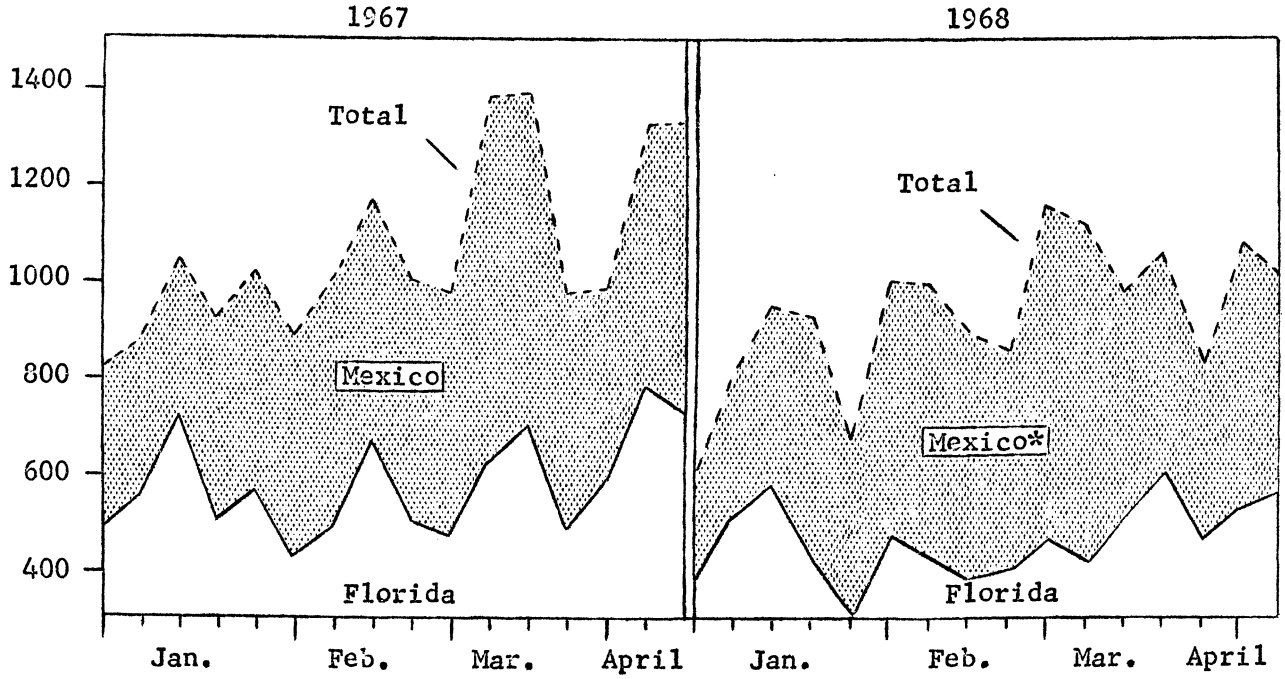
Week Ending	1964	1965	1966	1967
		(Carlot Equivalents)		
	TEXAS			
April 23	---	---	---	---
30	1	---	---	5
May 7	41	2	---	10
14	166	12	---	22
21	205	11	14	15
28	27	86	22	45
June 4	108	241	35	35
11	225	368	123	25
18	107	318	67	46
25	76	81	7	---
July 2	28	13	6	---
	CALIFORNIA			
April 23	8	9	9	8
30	13	10	7	8
May 7	10	17	6	8
14	14	17	10	16
21	20	18	12	19
28	33	26	21	20
June 2	43	48	39	21
9	85	78	73	99
16	---	124	185	160

Table 3(Continued)

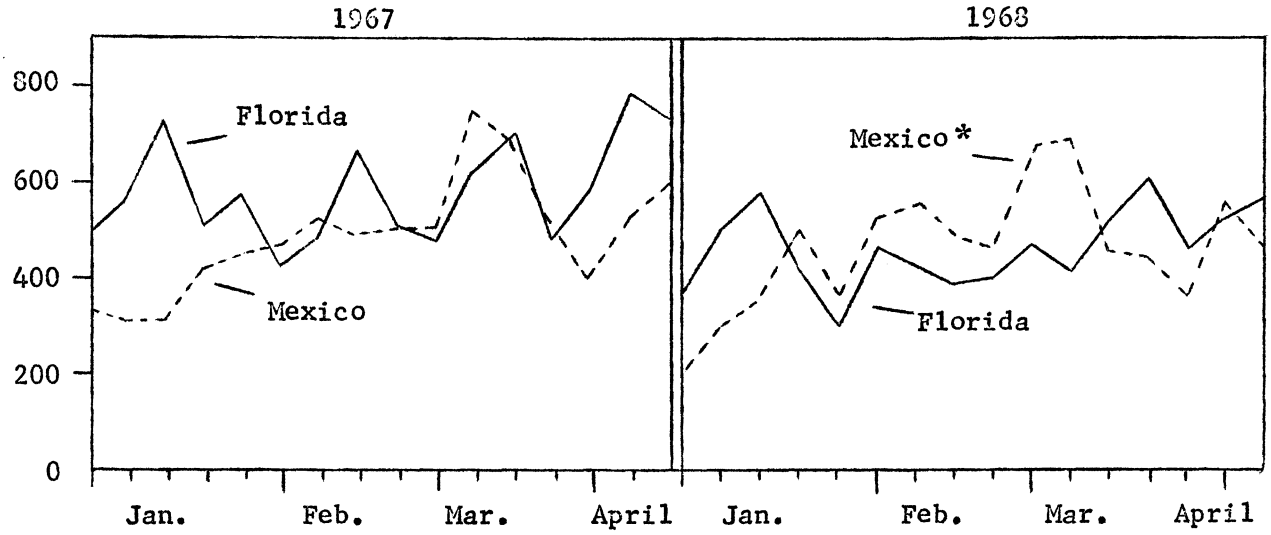
Week Ending	1964	1965	1966	1967
		(Carlot Equivalents)		
	FLORIDA			
April 23	925	823	715	759
30	1,209	907	794	762
May 7	1,661	1,013	969	998
14	1,087	1,229	1,136	1,071
21	1,191	1,221	1,242	1,000
28	962	1,049	1,153	914
June 4	655	572	1,178	825
11	190	148	667	277
18	53	43	212	95
25	13	13	23	---
July 2	7	3	4	---
	MEXICO			
April 23	468	431	---	---
30	533	578	473	490
May 7	409	617	450	359
14	426	319	397	575
21	281	243	294	427
28	178	266	184	233
June 2	90	100	87	229
9	79	49	27	150
16	---	45	---	121
	TOTAL SHIPMENTS			
April 23	1,399	1,263	1,288	1,375
30	1,751	1,495	1,274	1,265
May 7	2,138	1,649	1,425	1,375
14	1,693	1,577	1,543	1,684
21	1,696	1,493	1,545	1,461
28	1,200	1,427	1,381	1,212
June 2	858	961	1,339	1,110
9	579	643	893	550
16	---	530	475	422

Source: Florida Crop and Livestock Reporting Service, Orlando, Florida.

Figure 3. Weekly Shipments of Tomatoes from Florida and Mexico, 1967 and 1968 Spring Crops.



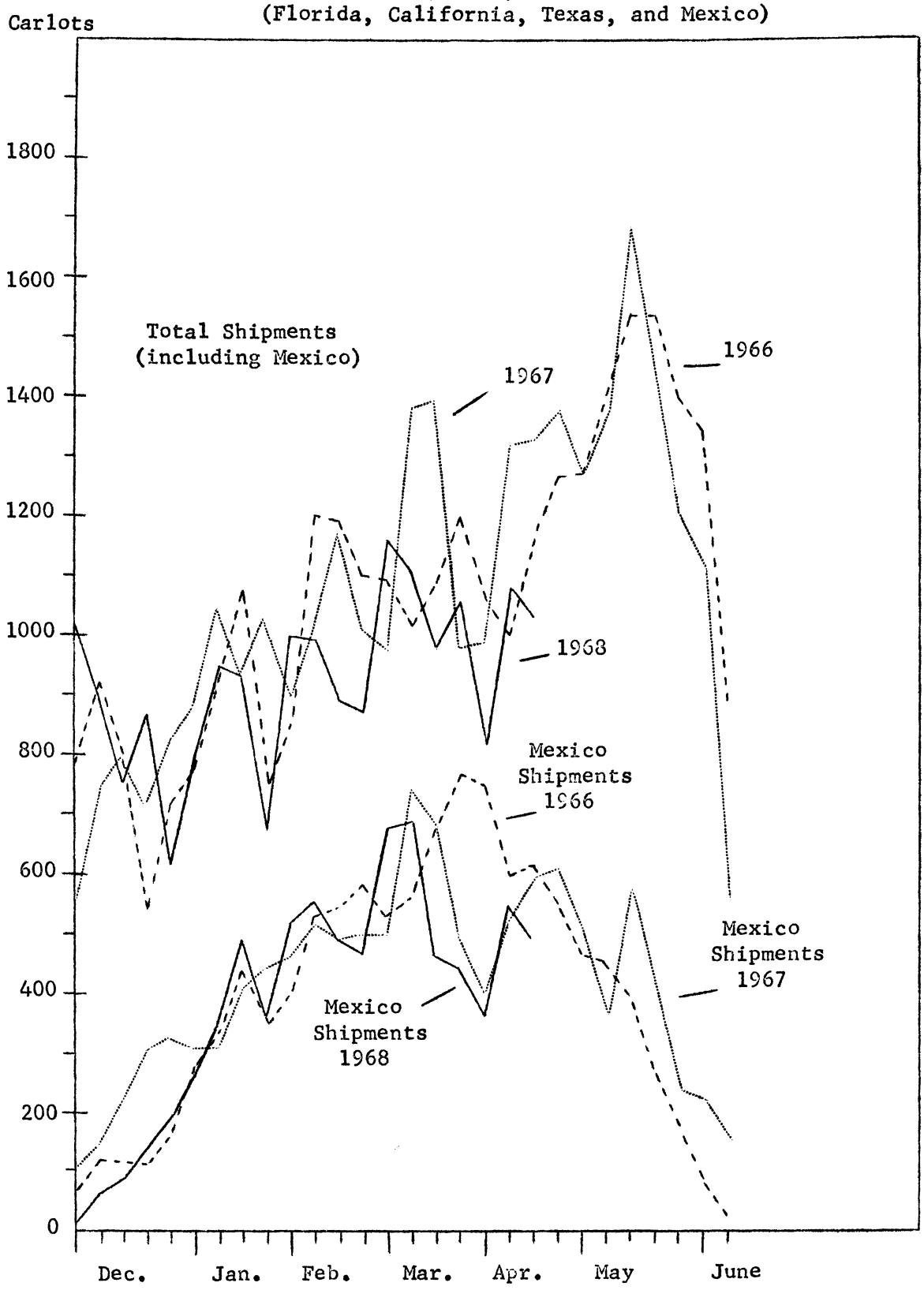
Total shipments in March and April, 1968 have been much lower than in 1967 and not as variable from week to week. Shipments from Mexico have been slightly smaller in late March and April than in 1967.



*Includes California

Source: Florida Crop and Livestock Reporting Service, Orlando, Florida.

Figure 4. Fresh Tomato Shipments in the United States, December-June, 1966,1967 and 1968 Seasons (Florida, California, Texas, and Mexico)



Source: Florida Crop and Livestock Reporting Service, Orlando,Florida

Tomato Prices

Prices of tomatoes on the Cleveland wholesale market in March and April, 1968 are much above those for this period in 1967, or 1966 and slightly higher than those for 1965. During the five-week period, March 18-April 21, greenhouse tomato prices in 1968 averaged 65 cents per basket above 1967. During these same weeks, vine ripe prices in 1968 were 80 cents a basket above those for 1967 and tube tomato prices were 89 cents higher than in 1967. For the same five-week period(March 18-April 21, 1968), greenhouse tomatoes have averaged about 39 cents per 8 lb. basket more than vine ripe tomatoes, and 44 cents per basket more than the 10-tube carton of tube tomatoes. During the more recent two weeks, greenhouse tomato prices were 9 cents per basket above those for vine ripe tomatoes and 22 cents above those for the 10-tube carton.

THE WAY IT LOOKS ON APRIL 22, 1968

If one had to determine a crop situation in the recent past that most nearly compares with the 1968 Spring Tomato Crop, it would be the 1966 crop. Just as in 1966, the potential is present in Florida for heavier shipments in late May and June than at present, and reportedly in Mexico for shipments at present levels for a longer than usual period. Florida will ship if the vines produce and if rain, hurricanes and hot weather do not ruin quality or crop,and Mexico will ship if production takes place and if prices are high enough to justify it. The acreage for heavy shipments is present in both areas. Acreages of tomatoes in Texas are down from 1967 and that state is no longer a major factor. Current data are not available on late spring plantings or on plantings in other states.

Table 4. Comparison of Weekly Average Tomato Prices on the Cleveland Market for 1965, 1966, 1967 and 1968 Spring Crop Seasons

Week Ending	1965 ($)	1966 ($)	1967 ($)	1968 ($)	Difference 1967 & 1968 ($)
		GREENHOUSE (8-1b. basket)			
March 3	-	-	-	-	-
March 10	-	-	-	4.00	-
March 17	-	-	-	4.00	-
March 24	3.75	3.25	3.15	3.77	+ .62
March 31	3.47	3.25	3.00	3.37	+ .37
April 7	3.25	3.25	2.55	3.30	+ .75
April 14	3.25	3.09	2.70	3.50	+ .80
April 21	3.25	2.65	2.80	3.50	+ .70
		VINE RIPE (8-1b. carton)			
March 3	2.09	1.54	2.15	3.25	+1.10
March 10	2.10	1.75	2.75	3.00	+ .25
March 17	2.42	2.00	1.65	2.90	+1.25
March 24	2.85	2.10	1.87	2.68	+ .81
March 31	2.55	2.45	2.05	2.45	+ .40
April 7	2.25	2.78	2.25	3.14	+ .89
April 14	2.90	2.60	2.58	3.57	+ .99
April 21	2.90	2.15	2.33	3.25	+ .92
		TUBE (10-tube carton)			
March 3	2.29	1.82	2.00	3.07	+1.07
March 10	2.62	2.00	2.42	3.17	+ .75
March 17	2.75	2.12	2.30	3.04	+ .74
March 24	2.72	2.15	2.12	2.87	+ .75
March 31	2.62	2.17	2.00	2.77	+ .77
April 7	2.72	2.68	2.00	3.02	+1.02
April 14	3.25	2.86	2.56	3.37	+ .81
April 21	3.12	2.70	2.12	3.20	+1.08

Source: Based on Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Market News, U.S.D.A. , C & MS, Cleveland, Ohio.

Despite the larger than normal acreage yet to begin harvest, the outlook for tomato supplies for the next 3-5 weeks appears even more favorable to the greenhouse producer than at present. The harvest of vine ripe tomatoes is about finished and shippers are having trouble getting size and quality on those remaining. The heavy acreage of mature green tomato plantings in the Manatee-Ruskin area was damaged in a March 22 freeze and will have poor quality in the early pick instead of the normal best quality for this part of the crop. Weather permitting, there will be somewhat larger than normal repack tomato supplies after early June and a break in tomato prices.

Some disturbing clouds on the horizon continue to be a source of worry. In the first place, greenhouse tomatoes do not bring the premium over tube tomatoes in April and May today that they did ten or even five years ago. The reasons are not obvious and should be investigated, and if possible, corrected. A second concern to all fresh tomato producers is a new product--canned slices and wedges that are suitable for salad use. The solution to the problem indicated by either of these developments lies in further improved quality in greenhouse tomatoes, as well as in improved promotional and marketing organization and techniques. Quality improvement methods range from short-term efforts for riper harvest and improved handling techniques to improved production through proper fertilizer, water, temperature control and other techniques and to long-term quality improvements through tomato-breeding programs. The alternative to having a greenhouse tomato that is recognized as both different and superior to competing tomatoes, is to have a greenhouse tomato industry whose prosperity is ever more and more dependent on the crop and price in Florida and Mexico.